



## A Sweet Spinster.

(Copyrighted, 1895, by E. Louis Laddell.)

"Dear me," chirped Miss Patience Cummings, "I can't seem to sense it, that it's so near Christmas."

"Well, I guess you would, if you had as much to do as I have," snapped her sister-in-law. "But some folks can always take things easy."

"I don't think you need talk like that, Susan," returned Patience, "I'm always willing to help, and I calculate to pay my way."

"Humph," retorted Susan, with an aggressive sniff, "what do old maids know about the care of housekeeping? I'd like to know."

"Now, Susan," said Patience, the color rising in her delicate face, "if you say so I'll go right out in the kitchen this minute and take hold of the baking."

"Well, I should think you'd know that I'd rather you'd keep at work on that suit of Jim's. There he is wearing his last pair of pants, and he's got to wear a new suit when he comes through the house to say nothing of the seat," returned Susan, in aggrieved tones. "I never did see such a young one's head as his for wearing old clothes," she continued complacently, her voice softening, for little Jim was her one weakness.

The older woman sighed as she bent over her work.

"Patience," she said to herself, "seems though they must know I'd need a lot, or they wouldn't give me the name."

Susan in the meantime had gone out into the kitchen, and was stirring round in a lively manner among the cooking utensils. "Makin' things hum," as her more easy-going husband was wont to remark.

Presently Patience became aware, from the cessation of domestic clatter, and the sound of voices in animated conversation, that Susan had a visitor.

"Don't see what made 'em come in the back door," she said to herself, with a feeling of regret, that she was missing a little innocent gossip.

But she refrained from going to see who it was from a feeling that her sister-in-law wouldn't like it—and Susan was a little "difficult" sometimes. So she continued at her work.

"Don't you know," said Patience, in pleased surprise, "I'd like to have seen May myself. Why didn't you bring her in here?"

"Well, I calculated to," said Susan, looking a little confused, "but we got to talking, and all at once May said she must go, and told me to give her love to you."

"Much obliged," returned Patience, politely.

"I've got news for you," ventured Susan, eyeing her doubtfully. "Who do you suppose is going to get married?"

"I sure I dunno," replied Patience, absently. She was feeling disappointed at not seeing May.

"Well, it's Squire Willard, and he's going to marry a widdler woman from Linebrook, with two grown-up daughters. What do you think of that?"

"I s'pose he's got a right to," said Patience defiantly, but her fingers were trembling, and she bent her head still lower over her work.

"For my part, I must say I think he's trootin' somebody else more than he is you, Susan," after all his comin' here so frequent the last year."

Patience held her head up proudly at this insinuation. "I'd just as soon understand Susan," after all his comin' here so frequent the last year."

"Well, you needn't get huffy 'bout it," muttered Susan as she went out to resume her onslaught on the pans and kettles.

Poor Miss Patience! She had secretly admired Squire Willard all her life. As a young man he had been "kept company" with pretty Patsie Cummings, but when he had married his cousin, the old squireward, Patsie had tried to put all thought of him out of her heart. But no other of her numerous beaux had found favor in her sight.

Now that, who had succeeded to his father's title, had been a widower for several years, and if this renewed attentions to his old sweetheart had caused her to build some delightful air castles which could wonder or blame her, even if she had passed her thirty-third birthday and was "old enough to know better."

So it is not surprising that Miss Patience worked buttonholes and felled seams on little Jim's new suit with a heavy heart for the remainder of the day.

However, she comforted herself with the philosophic reflection that "nobody ever felt so bad that they didn't feel better some time."

Christmas Day passed uneventfully. There was the usual turkey and plum pudding, and little else to remind one that it was a holiday. The members of the family were reserving themselves for evening, when they were going to Linebrook to attend a Christmas festival held in the church, the principal feature of which was a Christmas tree.

Patience had never seen one, and would have enjoyed going, but there wasn't room for her in the sleigh, and besides it never seemed to occur to her brother or his wife, that the "old maid" could be interested in any sort of amusement.

So she resigned herself to a lonely evening at home.

"Now, Patience Cummings, there's no moanin' 'bouted," she soliloquized, trying to dispel the forlorn feeling that came over her as she came back into the big empty sitting room, after seeing the rest of the family off.

"You're just goin' to fetch some elder apples, an' pop some corn an' have a real good time."

Acting on this resolution she brought in from the pantry a dish of rosy-cheeked apples and ears of wheat, and with slight hesitation she set them on the table, when she started up with a smile on her face.

"Why shouldn't I?" she exclaimed, "Christmas don't come once a year, and I'm lightin' a candle to see my little room for the first time in a long while."

Lighting a candle she went up to her little room on the old-fashioned mahogany landing, and there, as she had expected, took down her two, and only, highly prized silk gowns.

One delicate dove color, had been her mother's wedding gown, and with slight variations, from time to time, had served Patience on those rare occasions when something extraordinary in the way of dress was required. The other was a steady-going black silk.

She regarded them lovingly, but critically, withal.

"I would be more sensible to put on the black," she argued, smoothing the ruchings in neck and sleeves. "But the other's more dressy—an' I've a good mind to wear it, no knowin' when I'll have another chance, I believe I will."

And she resolutely replaced the black dress on its pegs, and hastily for the dress on its cold-attired herself in the pretentious garb of former days.

Thus done, she arranged her still scant fair hair high up on her head, but in a high-topped silk comb—her mother's—and regarded herself "daisy" in the small looking-glass.

shone! She smiled back at her own reflection.

"Patience Cummings," said she, "you're a very frivolous woman, but it's only for this once, you understand. And lifting her chin with a toss, she took the candle in the other, and descended to the sitting room.

"Oughter have some flowers, I expect," said she, recklessly breaking off two of the finest blossoms from her favorite pink rose bush in the window.

One at her throat, the other in her hand. "Now I look something like," said she.

At that moment there came a loud knock at the door.

She started, startled. "Who under the canopy can it be?" she ejaculated. "An' what will they think of me! I daren't show my head."

Another knock louder than before.

"S'pose I'll have to see who's there," and she looked around for something with which to cover up her fiery. She slipped Susan's water-proof hanging over a chair, and enveloping herself in its ample folds she opened the door a very little and looked cautiously out.

"Oh, how do you do, Squire Willard? You gave me an awful scare. Won't you come in?" she exclaimed, opening the door wide.

"Well, I guess I will, seeing that's what I came over for," responded the visitor, reaching out a hand in friendly greeting.

Patience couldn't extend hers very far, on account of that old water-proof, but she held the best she could under the circumstances.

"The folks have all gone away," she informed him, rather stiffly. She wasn't at all sure that she didn't wish her visitor away, too.

"Yes, I saw 'em go by," said the squire, who had been dressing himself in his overcoat, "an' I noticed you wasn't alone, so I thought I'd come over. But maybe you were goin' out," he added, regarding her with the expression of perplexity on his genial face.

He recoiled with some embarrassment that she hadn't asked him to take off his overcoat, or sit down, and somewhere she didn't look very cordial, standing there with that long black thing hanging around her.

"I don't want to hinder you," he continued. "I wasn't thinkin' of goin' out," replied Patience, and then she laughed.

"Now, what's the joke?" asked the squire, looking somewhat relieved at this sudden change in demeanor on her part.

"I guess I don't seem over a novice polite," said Patience, apologetically. "But couldn't keep from laughin' to think of goin' out in this rig," and she threw off the cloak and stood smiling and blushing before the squire.

"Why, Patsie!" cried the squire, using the old familiar name unconsciously, "you look pretty as a picture."

"Wouldn't you think I'm a fool," said she. "I guess not," he returned. "Seems to me I've seen you wear that dress before."

"No, I s'pose you'd remember," murmured she.

"Don't seem's though 'twas more'n a week since you wore it to that party over to our house," he continued in remembrance of the time.

"Don't it?" she returned faintly, her eyes downcast.

"Patsie!" said he, regarding her tenderly. "I made a mistake a great many years ago—I won't talk 'bout that, though. But I always thought a sight of you, an' I've been thinkin' considerable 'bout old times lately—an' wonderin' if you didn't—that is, if you wouldn't give me another chance."

"Wouldn't you?" he asked, looking at her with a dream.

She raised her eyes inquiringly. The squire's face was very near her.

"I want you for my wife, Patsie," said he, softly.

"Oh, Squire Willard, do you really mean it?" she exclaimed, tremendously.

"Mean it? Why, Patsie!" said the squire, reproachfully.

And his arguments in the affirmative were so very conclusive and convincing that Patience felt her doubts gradually melt away, and speedily believed herself to be the happiest woman in the world.

In fact, they had sailed up into the seventh heaven of bliss, where they doubtless would have remained indefinitely, but for Patience's unfortunate memory. She suddenly withdrew from her lover's encircling arms.

"Squire Willard," said she, seriously, "I just forgot myself."

"That's all right, I hope you'll forget yourself again," returned he. "You'd better forget to call me 'squire,' too."

"I ain't jokin'," said Patience, with dignity. "an' I think I oughter know 'bout that widdler woman you're goin' to marry."

"Widdler woman?" cried the squire, in astonishment. "I ain't goin' to marry any widdler, unless you're one."

"Don't you go regular to Linebrook to see a widdler with two grown-up daughters?" demanded Patience.

"Yes, I do," answered the squire, his eyes twinkling; "but I dunno's I'm 'bliged to marry her."

"No, I s'pose you can go around breakin' women's hearts," returned Patience, her voice trembling. She felt that her idol was shamed, and her short-lived happiness at an end.

"Now, Patsie," said the squire, repressing an evident inclination to laugh. "I shouldn't have come here to believe any such yarn. I s'posed you knew that I went over to Linebrook to see Sister Ellen, she lost her husband six months ago, an' I went to see her."

"Well, if that don't beat all, I dunno's I'd ever forgive me," faltered Patience.

"Well, I'll try," returned he. "S'pose I begin now."

The squire never did anything by halves, and certainly the happy peasant could not complain that he was not very thorough in this matter of granting absolution.

He made one demand, however, which was not asked, and on New Year's Day the wedding bells rang merrily for the squire and his bride.

## AN UNREDEEMED PLEDGE.

BY E. L. BANK.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" The cry rang out on Oxford street, near Tottenham Court road. It came from a pretty girl, stylishly dressed, who, a moment before, might have been observed looking into one of the shop windows. "Won't anybody stop him? He has my purse!" she called out again, pointing down the street, where a man's figure could be seen making rapid headway.

The assembled crowd gazed after him, but not one attempted to make chase, so the thief herself started in pursuit, while the passers were eluded by the sight of an excited looking young woman running along Oxford street with her brown sailor hat knocked sideways and her hair tumbling down. Suddenly the man turned right-about-face, and ran back again to ward Tottenham Court road, straight into the outstretched arms of a policeman.

When the girl arrived on the spot she was pale and almost breathless, but she managed to say, "He took my purse," when the officer asked the cause of the disturbance.

The thief—a medium sized, cadaverous looking man—glanced first at the policeman, then at the girl, with wild eyes, and to the astonishment of everyone, blurted out: "Yes, I've got it! Here it is!" He took from his pocket a large algerian purse, embellished with curious wrought silver initials, and handed it to the officer with a dogged air of bravado.

"Is this yours, lady?" asked the officer, turning to the accused.

"Yes, please give it to me and let the man off. I don't think he'll steal again," she answered, holding out her hand to receive it.

"I couldn't do that, miss. You'll have to go to the station and identify it," was the reply.

The girl's face turned pale still as she begged to be given back her property, but finding her pleading of no avail, she followed to the station.

The official in charge handed her a book and directed her to write her name, address and occupation; so, with trembling fingers, she wrote: "Alice Moreton, bank number, Blank street, Bloomsbury; stenographer and typewriter."

The accused also gave a name and address, and, turning to the young lady, stammered out: "I shouldn't have done it, lady, but I was hungry, and hadn't had anything for two days."

The same old story. That's the way with all of you," answered the policeman, gruffly. The girl was about to say something to the prisoner, when, glancing at the officer, who had the stolen purse, she noticed that he was surrounded. In the waiting room, where she stood to wait for the train, she saw a man who had been called a "professional thief."

He belonged to the "out-of-works," who rather every Sunday in Hyde Park and listen to the gospel of socialism. He had never before attempted stealing purses, but the affair did not trouble him. The young lady, judging by her clothes, and the purse, must be tolerably well-to-do, and, as all young ladies were soft-hearted, she would doubtless ask the magistrate to let him off.

The supposed well-to-do young lady went to the address she had given, and spent her evening in a small fourth-story back room in a Bloomsbury lodging-house. Up to midnight she sat by a dim candle darning a pair of rather discouraging stockings. The room was modeled on the pattern of the cheap, upper story lodging-house chamber, and the candle only half disclosed the shabbiness of the rickety furniture. As the darning needle moved back and forth a sort of grin, defiant smile gathered on the girl's face.

"Well," she mused, "this is an instance of one-half the world not knowing how the other half lives. The man was doubtless

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